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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN, 19-20 JUNE 2007 (C)

Classified By: ZINK, JAMES, LTC, DATT, USDAO ASHGABAT, DIA.
E.O. 12958 REASON: 1.4 (a), (b)

FOR COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND, ADM FALLON FROM CHARGE
D'AFFAIRES, JENNIFER BRUSH, AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES
ZINK, DEFENSE ATTACHE, ASHGABAT, TURKMENISTAN.

¶1. (C) Executive Summary. Your first visit to Turkmenistan helps continue the ongoing, bilateral dialogue on security issues, while reinforcing the progress made by the United States since December 2006 in "turning a new page" in its overall relationship with Turkmenistan. Although the new president, Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, is making significant changes in some sectors, it is important to realize the country is at the very beginning of a new era. The wreck of a country left behind by the now-deceased President-for-Life, Niyazov, combined with 70 years of colonial Soviet rule, compounded by nomadic/tribal customs and lack of a nation-state concept, create the need for a new model. Turkmenistan was never North Korea, but it is not yet Denmark. Rather, the current state offers a rare opportunity to develop a new model; a model molded by, and representative of, the proud people of Turkmenistan, with patient but consistent nudges by the international community.

¶2. (C) Our security relationship with Turkmenistan continued unabated through the period of the presidential transition and the Defense Ministry appears ready for future cooperation to continue at a slow and consistent pace. Competition for the time and attention of security officials is increasing, however, as other countries, such as Russia, also are keen to improve to their security relationships with Turkmenistan. The challenge for U.S. security cooperation efforts remains finding areas with real traction that produce meaningful changes and result in a stronger, sovereign state and better security partner for the United States.

¶3. (U//FOUO) Introduction. Turkmenistan is a hydrocarbon-rich state that shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran. You will find Turkmenistan in the midst of an historic political transition: the unexpected death of President Niyazov on December 21, 2006, ended the authoritarian, one-man dictatorship that for 15 years made Turkmenistan among the most repressive countries in the world. The peaceful transfer of power following Niyazov's death confounded many who had predicted instability because of the former president's open-ended succession scenario. His successor, President Berdimuhammedov, quickly assumed

power following Niyazov's death with the assistance of the "power ministries" -- including the Ministries of National Security and Defense, and the Presidential Guard -- but his position was, in fact, subsequently confirmed through a public election in which the population eagerly participated, even if it did not meet international standards.

¶4. (S//NF) Since his inauguration on February 14, Berdimuhammedov steadily has been replacing senior power ministry officials involved in his accession to power, such as Niyazov's long-serving presidential security chief, the Minister of Internal Affairs, and the Deputy Minister of National Security. Most see this as an indication of Berdimuhammedov's growing sense of security. Rumors are circulating that the departures of Minister of National Security Ashyrmuhammedov and Minister of Defense Mammetgeldiyev also may be imminent.

¶5. (U//FOUO) Berdimuhammedov also has cautiously started moderating Niyazov's cult of personality: although you will still see pictures of the deceased president on all major buildings and references to Niyazov's literary works, especially the "Ruhnama," scattered on signs around the city, the new president has banned the huge stadium gatherings and requirement for students and government workers to line the streets, often for hours, along presidential motorcade routes. That said, in some places, Niyazov's picture has been replaced by Berdimuhammedov's, and the new president's quotes are now beginning to appear on signs along transportation routes. Berdimuhammedov still pays lip service to maintaining his predecessor's policies, but he has started reversing many of the most destructive, especially in the areas of education, health and social welfare.

ASHGABAT 00000564 002 OF 006

Turkmenistan's People's Council made additional changes to the troubled agriculture sector during a March 30 special session. And, although the president has been slower to strengthen the rule of law, correct Turkmenistan's abysmal human rights record, and promote economic reform, he has told U.S. officials he wants to "turn the page" on the bilateral relationship and is willing to work on areas that hindered improved relations under Niyazov. The government says it is eager to work with the UN, OSCE, and other partners to learn how to meet international standards.

¶6. (U//FOUO) U.S. policy in Turkmenistan is three-fold:
-- Encourage democratic reform and increased respect for human rights, including support for improvements in the education and health systems;
-- Encourage economic reform and growth of a market economy and private-sector agriculture, as well as diversification of Turkmenistan's energy export options;
-- Promote security cooperation.

¶7. (U//FOUO) Berdimuhammedov remains closely tied to Niyazov-era interest groups focused on self-preservation. Although security cooperation continues to improve and the government has welcomed assistance in education, health and agriculture, many of the democratic and economic reforms the U.S. government promotes are viewed as challenges to the regime's existence. In the short term, the U.S. government is linking better bilateral relations and assistance in the areas where the regime wants development to gradual democratic and economic reform. For the longer term, the embassy is focusing on preparing the next generation of leaders and society in general with tools to build a more democratic, secure and prosperous nation.

¶8. (U//FOUO) Turkmenistan remains a tempting target for increased cooperation on energy and security, but its past human rights record makes this cooperation problematic. In raising its human rights concerns, the United States is focusing on three areas:

-- Freedom of Movement: Turkmenistan maintains a travel restriction list ("black list") of individuals not allowed to leave or, in some cases, to travel within the country. Most of the restricted travelers have an immediate or extended family member implicated in the November 2002 alleged assassination attempt against President Niyazov. The United States is focusing its efforts on calling for: 1) a clear and transparent process for placing a citizen's name on the restricted travel list; 2) notification to the citizen prior to his/her attempt to travel; and 3) the establishment of a process for removal from the list.

-- Religious Freedom/Country of Particular Concern: Although Turkmenistan has improved its religious freedom record during the past two years, some groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, have still been unable to register (a requirement for legal religious activity), and most groups report that they continue to have difficulties importing religious literature (other than the Bible or the Koran). Unregistered and some registered groups continue to experience police harassment, albeit on a slightly lesser scale than previously.

-- Civil Society Group Registration: Since the 2003 law that required all registered NGOs to re-register, very few independent NGOs have been registered by the Ministry of Justice. The embassy has determined that fewer than 10 independent civil society groups have received NGO registration under the new law. Even after registration, however, NGOs continue to have problems, including monitoring of their activities. The embassy has provided legal consultations on registration issues to civil society groups wanting to register, but ultimately the law on registration of organizations will probably need to be reformed.

19. (U//FOUO) Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy. Notwithstanding his statements that he plans to continue the neutrality policies of his predecessor, Berdimuhammedov -- probably at the advice of Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov -- has put a virtually unprecedented emphasis on foreign affairs. Indeed,

ASHGABAT 00000564 003 OF 006

Berdimuhammedov has met or spoken telephonically with all the leaders in the region -- including with President Aliyev of Azerbaijan, with whom Niyazov maintained a running feud -- and agreed to visits. He has exchanged visits with Russia's President Putin, and held a high-profile gas summit with Putin and Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev in Turkmenistan's Caspian seaside city of Turkmenbashi (Krasnovodsk). China, which has a strong and growing commercial presence in Turkmenistan and which remains interested in ensuring that the United States does not establish a security presence here, continues to court Berdimuhammedov through a series of high-level commercial and legislative visits. And, while Turkey has given Berdimuhammedov top-level treatment, including an invitation to Ankara, its relationship with Turkmenistan continues to be colored more by the image of its lucrative trade and construction contracts that are siphoning hundreds of millions of dollars away from state budgets here than by generous development assistance or fraternal support.

Berdimuhammedov has also held very positive meetings with two U.S. State Department officials and leaders of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations to discuss areas of potential assistance, and met with UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Louise Arbour in May, the Head of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Christian Strohal, and agreed to a visit by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom at an as-yet undetermined date.

10. (U) Gas Games. Turkmenistan has world-class natural gas reserves, but Russia's monopoly of its energy exports has left Turkmenistan receiving less than the world price and overly beholden to Russia. Pipeline diversification, including both a pipeline to China proposed

for 2009 and the possibility of resurrecting plans for a Trans-Caspian pipeline that would avoid the Russian routes, and construction of high-power electricity lines to transport excess energy to Turkmenistan's neighbors, including Afghanistan, would not only enhance Turkmenistan's economic and political sovereignty, but also help fuel new levels of prosperity throughout the region. Berdimuhammedov has told USG interlocutors he recognizes the need for more options and has taken the first steps to this end, but he also took the first steps needed to increase the volume of gas exports to Russia -- agreeing to build a new littoral pipeline -- during the May tripartite summit in Turkmenbashi. He will require encouragement and assistance from the international community if he is to maintain a course of diversification in the face of almost certain Russian efforts to keep Turkmenistan from weaning itself away from Russia.

¶11. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Turkmenistan Armed Forces. General of the Army Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev has remained the Minister of Defense since 2002. Mammetgeldiyev is a medical doctor, by training, and was previously the Chief of the State Border Service (SBS). His primary deputy and acting Chief of the General Staff, COL Muhammetguly Atabayev, is also a medical doctor. The only general officer in the ministry is the minister. Since taking office, President Berdimuhammedov has initiated several changes affecting the military, which Niyazov previously maintained as a non-threatening institution and source of cheap labor for traffic safety, area beautification, hospital orderlies, and other enterprises. The Defense Ministry (MOD) is in the process of transferring to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) emergency response-related responsibilities for monitoring and controlling traffic and road safety, as well as fire prevention and fire fighting. The standing MOD practice of supplying conscripts for civilian medical services and other civilian enterprises also may be changing.

The military, however, largely remains a parade force that performs one "major" battalion-level exercise annually, and only now may be receiving additional presidential attention to repair and upgrade its aging Soviet-era equipment. President Berdimuhammedov's recent decision to allow cabinet level ministers to travel abroad opens the door for General Mammetgeldiyev to accept invitations to visit the U.S. and participate in foreign events, which he previously was forced to decline.

¶12. (U//FOUO) U.S. Defense Cooperation. Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT 00000564 004 OF 006

continues to occupy a strategic location in the Global War on Terrorism. Niyazov's UN-endorsed policy of "positive neutrality" kept Turkmenistan at arm's length from Russian military encumbrances -- and from Iranian maneuvering; Niyazov used his minimal security relationship with the United States to show his "independence" from Moscow. Turkmenistan remains an important conduit for the U.S. military to Afghanistan, and maintenance of overflights and the military refueling operation at Ashgabat Airport remain a key embassy goal. Although Turkmenistan is not an option for basing, the Turkmenistan government verbally has approved the use of Mary Northeast Military Airbase as an emergency divert location for distressed U.S. military aircraft. In the interests of formalizing this arrangement, the U.S. Embassy forwarded a DOD and DOS-approved proposed agreement via diplomatic note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 15 May 2007 and is awaiting a response.

¶13. (S//NF) Turkmenistan agreed to deny overflight rights for Iranian flights from North Korea, at the behest of the United States. The first overflight denial occurred in June 2005 and the most recent denial was on 19 July 2006. Turkmenistan's cooperation on denying overflights is based on strict confidentiality. The USG does not discuss Turkmenistan's decisions

with other governments. Turkmenistan has publicly approved the principles of the Proliferation Security Initiative and agreed to join the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

¶14. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation. In addition to OEF support, Turkmenistan cooperates with the U.S. military through the CENTCOM annual military-to-military (MTM) contact plan. The MTM plan has grown from 20 events in FY05 to over 50 agreed upon events in FY07 involving the Ministry of Defense, State Border Service, and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Through the State Partnership Program and annual MTM plan, Turkmenistan has a long-standing relationship with the Nevada National Guard mostly focusing on disaster preparedness. Turkmenistan marginally participates in NATO and EUCOM exchanges, but has participated in Marshall Center programs since 1994. The embassy is in the process of responding to CENTCOM's NSDD-38 request to establish a Security Assistance Officer position in Ashgabat to manage this increased level of security cooperation.

¶15. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM also provided \$5 million in counter narcotics funding for the construction of two border crossing stations. The Altyn Asyr border crossing station on the Iranian border was opened in November 2006 and the Imamnazar border crossing station on the Afghanistan border is scheduled to open on 13 August 2007. The embassy hopes to continue working with CENTCOM in the important areas of border security and counter-narcotics, primarily focused on the Afghanistan border.

¶16. (U//FOUO) The CENTCOM Action Officer Working Group held in Ashgabat on 6-7 March 2007 has laid a solid basis for the development of the FY08 MTM Plan and beyond. Turkmenistan officers from the MOD, SBS, and MVD participated more actively in the development of future events than in the past. Subsequently and for the first time in at least recent memory, the Ministry of Defense provided a letter identifying areas of interest for future IMET courses and training. SBS interest in serious cooperation with the U.S. military remains less clear. Your visit provides the first opportunity to discuss CENTCOM's security cooperation plans with State Border Service Chief GEN-MAJ Alovov. Cooperation with the MVD is mainly via the Marshall Center and now in the area of fire response. (See IIR 6 940 0013 07/TURKMENISTAN ARMED FORCES INCREASINGLY ENGAGED IN DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE BILATERAL MILITARY COOPERATION ACTIVITIES (U), 161206Z MAR 07.)

¶17. (U//FOUO) U.S. Security Assistance. Current security assistance programs focus on improving the communications capability of the Turkmenistan armed forces in the areas of emergency response and border security, English language

ASHGABAT 00000564 005 OF 006

ability, and in building a future leadership with Western principles. Current FMF/IMET projections for FY07 are \$250K/\$424K, FY08 \$0/\$300K, and the USG interagency is re-looking USG assistance to Turkmenistan for FY09, for which embassy has requested \$2.8M/\$700K. Turkmenistan has participated in FMF/IMET since 1997.

¶18. (U//FOUO) During your visit, embassy recommends Commander, USCENTCOM, emphasize the following:

-- (U) Political and economic reform in Turkmenistan - Security agreements between the U.S. and Turkmenistan cannot be achieved through military cooperation only. The stability of any nation depends on adherence to international human rights obligations. The United States values freedom of movement, religious expression, minority rights, civil society and education as much as it values military security. A strong military is composed of a well-educated corps of professionals who are trusted to make decisions appropriate to their authorities and who are guided by a duty to protect

the interests of the people they serve.

-- (U) Regional Security) Greater regional security cooperation through conferences, training, and exercises is in both the USG,s and Turkmenistan Government's best interests. The USG appreciates positive steps to improve cooperation with customs and border services, but further progress is essential, especially with Afghanistan.

-- (U//FOUO) Global War on Terrorism - Stress appreciation for Turkmenistan's continuing support to the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. Note the importance of humanitarian overflights and the Gas-N-Go operation for U.S. aircraft at Ashgabat International Airport which support the development of a stable Afghanistan. Express thanks for the ongoing cooperation with the U.S. Defense Attach Office on issues of Gas-N-Go and overflight clearances.

-- (U//FOUO) Mary Airbase Divert Agreement - Stress appreciation for government's offer of Mary Military Airfield as a divert landing location in the event of in-flight emergencies or bad weather. Request to know the status of the government's response to the embassy's diplomatic note. Emphasize the importance of establishing useful standard operating procedures for such emergencies with the U.S. Defense Attach Office.

-- (U//FOUO) FOR MEETINGS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND STATE COUNTER-NARCOTICS COMMISSION (MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY OFFICIALS) ONLY:

-- (SBU//FOUO) The embassy's Surveillance Detection (SD) program, which was shut down in April following the detention by the government of one of the embassy's SD specialists, is a security program mandated by the United States Congress; there are over 200 SD teams deployed at embassies around the globe, including in Russia and the rest of the Central Asian republics. The embassy stands ready to work with the Government of Turkmenistan and to modify SD operational procedures in order to ensure that all elements of the SD program comply with local law. It is necessary, however, to designate a point of contact to work with the embassy in order to do this. SD is an integral part of the embassy's security and the program needs to be reinstated.

-- (U//FOUO) The opening of the border crossing checkpoint at Imamnazar not only should greatly enhance Turkmenistan's ability to more effectively and efficiently manage cross-border transportation and trade, but also offers a possibility for improving cross-border contacts with Afghanistan's border and law enforcement officials. We hope that the opening of the Imamnazar checkpoint on August 13 will be held on a level that demonstrates Turkmenistan's recognition of that potential.

-- (U//FOUO) For all meetings, be prepared to respond to questions on the security situation and narcotics-related problems in Afghanistan, as well as press reports alleging the United States is planning to attack Iran. There will be less interest in the situation in Iraq.

ASHGABAT 00000564 006 OF 006

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